

The Sentinel Isle

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GOVERNORS ISLAND

FORT JAY



1637 - 1950



GOVERNORS ISLAND

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THE SENTINEL ISLE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GOVERNORS ISLAND

FORT JAY

Major Kenneth L. Boggs, *Artillery, U.S.A.*

● Situated in the world's busiest harbor, approximately half a mile off the southern tip of New York City, Governors Island is among the oldest and most historic of Manhattan's landmarks. When it is realized that the official status of this bit of land has prevailed for more than three hundred years under the successive flags of three world powers—Holland, England, and the United States—each one at war with one of the others and one at war with both, it will be granted that few other pieces of national real estate can surpass the appeal of Governors Island in continuity of historical interest and influence. The original Indian name for the Island was "Pagganck," referring to the groves of hickory, oak and chestnut trees with which its acres were then well covered; the Dutch, in turn, called it "Nutten" Island for the same reason.

The first white man to see the Island was probably the explorer, Giovanni da Verrazono, back in 1524, but the story of the Island really starts on June 16, 1637, when Wouter Van Twiller, first Dutch governor of New York bought the land from two Indians, Cakapeteyno and Pehiwasi, of the Manahatta tribe; the price was two ax heads, a string of beads, and a few nails. There is some doubt as to whether Governor Van Twiller ever lived on the Island, although it is known that he kept twenty-one pairs of goats there.

When Van Twiller was recalled to Holland in 1638, his purchase of the Island was declared illegal and the property was restored to the public domain to be considered a perquisite of the local governors. It has never since reverted to private ownership.

Despite the obvious strategic importance of its location at the juncture of the East and Hudson Rivers, no serious attempt was made by the Dutch to fortify Governors Island; as a result it could offer no resistance when four British frigates and a handful of men attacked and captured New Amsterdam in 1664. Nine years later, however, the Netherlands regained possession of their lost province, only to lose it when the English once more assumed control in 1674. Governors Island, therefore, had already been under two foreign flags when the Americans won possession during the Revolution.

In 1698 the Assembly set the tiny island aside as being "part of the Denizen of His Majestie's Governors for the time being" and hence it became known as "the Governor's Island." Eventually "the" and the apostrophe in "Governor's" were dropped, leaving the title as it is today — Governors Island. At that time only a swampy creek separated the island from Long Island at low tide, and farm women used the creek to carry their buttermilk to the New York market in boats. The name of the waterway, *Buttermilk Channel*, is derived from this use of it.

From 1652 until 1664 the Island is said to have been used as a public recreation ground and was described as a very pleasant place with a garden and "several walks of fruite trees" on it. In 1680 the Island settlement consisted of one house and pasturage for the governor's "parcel of sheep," coach horses and private cattle. Near the turn of the seventeenth century, Governor Fletcher spitefully planned to give away the Island before his successor's arrival, but his council "were ashamed" and refused to confirm the grant. A later governor, Lord Bellomont, persuaded the council to pass an edict forbidding any governor to grant away Nutten Island or any part of the King's domain.

Until the middle of the eighteenth century the Island remained unfortified and unguarded, used largely as a private recreation ground for the royal governors. When Lord Cornbury became governor in 1702 he raised the sum of £1500 by a series of unique taxes, among them being a levy of five shillings and sixpence on everyone who wore a pearl ring, and two shillings and fivepence on every bachelor over the age of twenty-five. With the money thus obtained, Lord Cornbury built a gubernatorial mansion on the high ground in the northeast section of the Island, which thereupon became the permanent home for the British governors.

Official records on this house and its exact location are no longer in existence but tradition places it where Quarters 14 now stands on the hill overlooking San Juan Dock; indeed, with no proof to the contrary, Quarters 14 may well be the actual house in question, for its architecture indicates early English origin. It is known to have been built prior to the War of 1812, when it served as a guard house and headquarters of the Island garrison; its cellar then contained the famous *Black Hole*, a cell for the solitary confinement of especially unruly prisoners. Until the Commanding General's Quarters were erected in 1840, Quarters 14 was the senior officer's home and was commonly called "the Governor's house." There is a legend that during the Revolution this house was connected by a tunnel to a private dock on Buttermilk Channel, by which the governor could make his escape to his official barge if the Island was beset by the rebel Americans; the tunnel and barge are reputed to have been large enough to accommodate the governor's coach and



Commanding General's Quarters

four so that his forced exit might be made as expeditiously as possible. No trace of this rumored tunnel can now be found.

COLONIAL PERIOD

● In 1755 Sir William Pepperell, an American-born British officer of outstanding ability, was camped on Governors Island in command of England's 51st Regiment of Foot. These troops formed the Island's first garrison of trained soldiers, and it was while there that Pepperell received his commission as major general, thus making him the first officer of that rank to command the Island. The 51st was joined later in the same year by the "Loyal American Provincial Regiment, 62nd Foot," a locally recruited unit of the British regular army, in contrast to the colonial militia. Both the Maryland and Virginia legislatures had appropriated funds for its enlistment, and it was considered one of the most important of the British regiments stationed in America. It was certainly one of the best-dressed for its uniform of white breeches and red coat faced with blue was elaborated by white lace and blue stripes on the cuffs.

On Christmas Day, in 1757, the designation of the 62nd Loyal Americans was changed to "The Royal American Regiment, 60th Foot" with the famous Lord Jeffrey Amherst in command; it is



*Chapel of St. Cornelius
The Centurion*

interesting to note that Horatio Gates, later to be the Adjutant General of the Continental Army under Washington, served as a major in in this same regiment. The Royal Americans were organized into four battalions—one of which was known as the "Governors Island

Battalion"—and a band, and although the regimental combat units were wisely transferred during the Revolution to Jamaica where their American sympathies could do no harm to the British cause, the musicians remained behind in New York to cheer up the Loyalists with frequent public concerts. An ancient regimental flag of the 60th now hangs in the Chapel of St. Cornelius the Centurion at Governors Island, a gift from the officers of the present regiment which, as the King's Royal Rifle Corps, 60th Foot, fought gallantly in World Wars I and II as allies of their former foes.

THE REVOLUTION

- At the conclusion of the wars with the French, Governors Island declined as a garrison, and not until the Revolution did it again take an important part in military history.

Among the early minor engagements of this period, Governors Island had a brief skirmish on July 12, 1776 with *H.M.S. Phoenix*, *H.M.S. Rose*, the schooner *Tryal*, and two tenders. These ships got under way to go up the East River past the city, and received direct artillery fire from Governors Island as well as from Red Hook in Brooklyn, the Battery at New York, and some guns in the town. The British report the rebels firing 196 rounds, but there are no records of the return fire.

To understand the activity centering about New York during the Revolution and the part in it played by Governors Island, it is necessary to recall the situation when the British attacked the city. In New England, Washington and his newly created army had proved more active than the British had anticipated and he had won control of Boston, forcing the Redcoats to retire to their ships. This success had added impetus to the American cause and by the time

the New York campaign was launched the war had become a serious business for the Colonies. Due to the hostility of the population of New York and the weakness of the small British forces located there it was evacuated by the English troops on 7 June 1775, Governors Island being used as a minor evacuation point. Some British ships remained in the bay, however, keeping New York in a state of turmoil. When it was learned that the British probably intended to attack the city by sea, the Americans decided that Governors Island must be occupied and fortified. Colonel Prescott's regiment of Bunker Hill fame was ordered to the Island to assist in erecting a citadel and outworks.

General Putnam was put in charge of the fortifications of New York City in April 1776, and four days after his arrival ordered that further additions be made to the Island's entrenching. One thousand men, drafted from troops stationed in the city, crossed under cover of night and threw up breastworks sufficient to protect the men from the fire of enemy ships. Colonel Nixon's Regiment joined Colonel Prescott's and Governors Island was then considered the strongest post in the Army. Some highly interesting facts in regard to the fortification of the Island at this period are found in a letter written by General George Washington to Lieutenant General Charles Lee, as follows:

"New York, May 9, 1776

My dear Lee:

We've done a great deal of work at this place. In a fortnight more I think the City will be in a very respectable posture of defense . . . Governor's Island has a large and strong work erected and a Regiment encamped there.

G. Washington"

The Americans held the Island and stood off the attacks of Admiral Howe's fleet until the end of August, when the retreat of the Continental Troops from Brooklyn and New York after the Battle of Long Island made their position untenable. They slipped out quietly during the night of August thirtieth, abandoning about forty cannon and

Quarters Fourteen "The Governor's House"



a store of ammunition and provisions. At this time four British warships bombarded the Island from their anchorage two miles down the Bay, ruining the fortifications and batteries. Two days later the British seized Governors Island and occupied it until 1783.

The Redcoats had a narrow escape a few days later as a result of the first submarine attack known to history. General Putnam had sanctioned the trial of an experimental submersible boat designed by one David Bushnell which, due to its strange appearance, he had named *The Turtle*. The craft measured about six feet in height and seven and one-half feet fore and aft and was built of heavy oak bound with iron bands, the seams calked and the hull smeared with tar. Shaped like an egg, with a small conning tower on the top, it



Historic Cannon Guarding Harbor

provided room for a crew of only one, and was propelled by this man operating a crank attached to two paddles fixed like the vanes of a windmill to an axle tree. This mechanism represented the first screw propeller, and by working hard, the operator could proceed at a speed of three miles an hour. A box of oak containing one hundred and fifty pounds of gunpowder as well as a timing mechanism was attached on top of the strange craft; this was the bomb which it was

hoped would wreck the British ships.

On the night of September 6, 1776, General Putnam and David Bushnell went down to Whitehall wharf, now called South Ferry, where they watched Sergeant Ezra Lee climb inside *The Turtle* and set out to attack the British fleet. Unfortunately the tide was with the sergeant, and before he realized it, he found himself carried rapidly past Admiral Howe's flagship, *H.M.S. Eagle*. It took him two and one-half hours to get back in position, but finally he submerged by using the tanks provided for this purpose. Working his way to the stern of the flagship, Lee attempted to attach his crude mine by means of a wood screw operated through the wall of his vessel, but every time he pressed against the ship's bottom, his small vessel bobbed away. After several vain attempts, he rose to the surface to

get a fresh supply of air and found it was daybreak. Not daring to delay longer, Lee set out for shore, but had to rise often to take bearings; his compass had failed him.

Emerging from one of his dives, Sergeant Lee discovered that he had drifted to within a few hundred yards of Governors Island. The British spotted him at once and registering more curiosity than dismay, manned a barge and came out to investigate. Lee submerged and at the same time released his bomb, hoping that the British would seize it. However, they viewed the lethal bait with definite distrust and left it alone, permitting it to float down into the Bay where it soon exploded with a tremendous roar. In the meantime Sergeant Lee paddled industriously for Whitehall where his friends had been awaiting his return with some anxiety.

From 1783, when the British finally evacuated New York, until 1794, Governors Island remained at peace, but threat of a French war put the Island back on a war basis. In 1794, Congress appropriated \$150,000 for fortifications on Governors Island; \$100,000 more was appropriated in 1795 to complete the works and in 1797, \$30,117 was allotted to build the fort now



Sallyport Moat and Drawbridge

known as Fort Jay and named after the then Secretary of State, John Jay. Such was the fear of French invasion that the professors and students of Columbia College came to the Island and worked with shovels and barrows to finish the work, the entire garrison at this time consisting of one major, one captain, one surgeon, two first lieutenants, one cadet, four artificers, four musicians, four non-commissioned officers, and 34 privates. The pay scale of the period, incidentally, ran from \$8 per month for a private to \$200 per month for a major general.

Regular ferry service between the Island and New York City was inaugurated in 1794, "Captain" John Hillyer being officially authorized to transport passengers in his rowboat at three cents each. As the Island's population grew in size, the Army assumed the respon-

sibility of maintaining the ferry service and by 1860 had a large fleet of boats of varying sizes, ranging from a small four-oared gig for the hospital's use to a big twelve-oared craft for the commanding general. These boats were popularly called "barges," and the office from which they were dispatched at the South Ferry in New York came to be known as the "Barge Office," a name which remains to this day. Steam ferry service to Governor's Island was begun in 1861.

By 1802 the Island fortifications had been completed to include a fort of two earthen bastions, partially lined with brick, a powder magazine, barracks, guard house, hospital, officers' quarters, and a block house. The site of this block house is marked by the present Quarters 13, which was built in 1840 and has also served as headquarters and hospital.

The fort was rebuilt several times during the next fifty years, but the original moat (now dry), gate, sallyport and magazine of the early 1800's have been preserved and the old drawbridge restored.

Aerial View of



Surmounting the gateway is an elaborate carving in red sandstone of the original coat of arms of the former War Department of the United States, sculptured by an Army prisoner who had been a stone-cutter. There is a tradition that during the progress of this work the little daughter of the fort's commanding officer passed under the gateway just as a large piece of the stone broke loose; the stone-cutter quickly interposed his body so that he received the full force of the falling block, thereby saving the child's life at serious injury to himself. He immediately received a full pardon. Within the fortress is a quadrangle of officers' quarters.

On February 15, 1800, Governors Island was ceded to the United States by the State of New York, and in 1810 the name of Fort Jay was changed to Fort Columbus. The old name of Jay was restored in 1904 by order of Elihu Root, Secretary of War.

One of the most prominent landmarks of Governors Island, and one familiar to all who have crossed New York Harbor, is Castle Williams, the round stone structure at the extreme northern tip of

Governors Island



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the Island. This building was begun in 1807 and completed in 1811 as one of twin forts to guard the channel between the Island and New York City; the other fort was Castle Clinton in New York's Battery Park, now being restored. Castle Williams was planned and erected by Colonel Jonathan Williams of the U.S. Corps of Engineers, who was at that time Superintendent of the Military Academy at West Point, President of the American Philosophical Society, and Chief Engineer of the U.S. Army, and had been put in charge of the defenses of the Port of New York in 1805. The Common Council, in appreciation of Colonel Williams' important services and as evidence of the distinguished esteem they entertained for his character and professional talents, requested that he sit for his portrait to be preserved in the gallery of portraits belonging to the city. The Castle, which during its construction had been known as "The Tower," was named Castle Williams in 1810.

Castle Williams was built on a point of the Island extending to the very edge of the channel. Its foundation of solid masonry was placed on a bed of rocks that had greatly endangered shipping at the mouth of the East River, since it was completely submerged except at a very low tide. Despite popular legend, there are no dungeons beneath the Castle.

The Castle walls form three-fifths of a circle, 210 feet in outer diameter, with bomb proof arches. They once contained two tiers of heavy cannon, the lower tier was for twenty-seven 35-pounders, the second tier for thirty-nine pounders, and the terrace over the bomb-proof formed a barbette battery for forty-five Columbiads. These were heavy muzzle loading guns, designed for throwing shells and

shot at high angles of elevation. The two tiers of guns were contained in a double row of arches, one above the other, and so constructed that if the lower tier was broken through the wall would still be supported by the upper tier acting as a bridge over the lower tier.

The walls of red sandstone are about 40 feet high, measuring eight feet thick at the bottom and seven feet thick at the top; the interior of Castle William is open to the sky. The outer cut of the wall was laid with each stone dovetailed so that no one stone could be dislocated without first being broken to pieces.



Entrance to Castle Williams



Castle Williams

The Castle also contained two magazines for 200 barrels of powder and an inexhaustible well of fine water, from which all shipping could be watered with ease. A zig-zag underground passage connected Castle Williams with Fort Jay; the entrance inside Fort Jay is still open, but the passage is blocked by a wall in the vicinity of the Station Hospital. The stone buildings inside the gate were torn down in 1912, and the entire building converted into a military prison.

Early in July 1812, when Colonel Williams was assigned to command his namesake fort, the Artillery Corps openly expressed its dissatisfaction at the assignment of an Engineer instead of an Artilleryman. A few days later Major Alex Macomb of the Corps of Engineers was appointed colonel of the 3rd Regiment of Artillery. Complications arising from this appointment, which threatened to deprive Colonel Williams of the command of the fort to which he felt himself entitled by rank and service, caused him to resign his commission in the Army on July 31, 1812.

THE WAR OF 1812

- The citizens of New York had little fear of attack by sea in the War of 1812. There were strong fortifications at the Narrows, bat-

teries on Ellis and Bedloe's Islands and in lower Manhattan; Fort Columbus had sixty heavy cannon mounted and could "bring one half its face at one instant against any passing ship;" Castle Williams had its two tiers of cannon, while South Battery (the present Governors Island Officers Club), built in 1812, guarded Buttermilk Channel. There was, however, grave danger of an attack by land from Long Island. Troops, both Infantry and Artillery, were therefore heavily concentrated about New York Harbor and especially Governors Island. In July of 1812 there were but two hundred artillerymen of the United States Army in all the forts near New York, the rest being from the militia of New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and Colonel Henry Burbeck, the Commanding Officer on Governors Island, was ordered to "cause these recruits to be instructed in the Artillery exercise."

CIVIL WAR

- In the post-Colonial period and until 1850 Governors Island was garrisoned entirely by Artillery troops; it then became a recruiting depot and so continued through the Civil War. During the conflict itself, Castle Williams was one of the most important prisons for Confederate officers and men; several Southern spies were executed there, and the number of prisoners frequently totaled more than 1500. One of these, Captain William Webb of the 2nd North Carolina Cavalry, made a spectacular escape from the Island in April of 1865. After he had been lodged in the Island's prison stockade scarcely more than twenty-four hours, Webb climbed the wall and slid unobserved into the waters of New York Bay. He was a powerful swimmer and despite the swift current, succeeded in safely reaching the Battery where a passerby helped him clamber up on shore. Asked who he was and where he had come from, Webb frankly replied that he was a Southern prisoner escaping from Governors Island, but the other thought he was joking and laughingly went on his way. For the next three days Webb wandered through the streets of New York unmolested in his Confederate uniform; he was stopped and questioned many times by both civilians and soldiers, but none would take his story seriously and he was still at liberty in Manhattan when Lee surrendered and brought the war to a close. The number of troops on the Island during the Civil War was out of all proportion to its size, no less than seven full regiments being stationed there at one time.

Although Governors Island was too far removed from the actual scene of the struggle to take any active part in the war between the states, it did play one short role of an extremely warlike character. During New York City's draft riots in 1863 the troops from the Island were transported to the city to guard the Sub-Treasury on Wall

Street, and when the rioters learned that the Island had been left unprotected, they decided to seize the Army's ferry boat, invade the Island and capture for their own use the great stocks of guns and ammunition stored there. Hearing of this plot, the authorities withdrew all the ferries to safety; not to be outdone, the rioters grabbed all the row boats they could find along the waterfront, and determinedly set across the channel. The eighty civilians employed in the Ordnance office on the Island saw the rioters approaching, hurriedly armed themselves, and then lined up along the shore, whence they trained some guns on the invaders. This unexpected welcome effectively dampened the spirits of the rioters and they withdrew with celerity and dispatch, leaving Governors Island unharmed.

In 1870 a yellow fever epidemic broke out on the Island; more than three hundred people were stricken with the dread disease in a month's time and many died.

At the end of the Civil War, the Island relapsed again into comparative inaction, although it remained a recruiting post until 1878, when it became Headquarters of the Division of the Atlantic under command of Major General Winfield Scott Hancock. By that time all thought of Governors Island as an effective military fortification was vanishing and it became purely an administrative center for Army affairs, a function which it continues to maintain today.

The early years of the twentieth century saw many changes on Governors Island. The garrison troops had already been transferred from Artillery to Infantry and in 1901, work was begun on the addition of made land to the west and south of the Island. Bay Road, now extending between South Battery (The Officers' Club) and Castle Williams, marks the former south shore line. A new sea wall was constructed out in the bay and the intervening space was gradually built up with dirt and stone from the excavation for the Fourth Avenue Subway, then under construction. By 1912, 102 acres had been added to the Island at a cost of more than \$1,000,000.

Across the northeast end of this area extends "Building 100," the largest of the permanent housing projects on the Island. This great brick structure, erected in 1929, can serve as barracks for an entire regiment and takes the place of the former separate barracks units in the Fort Jay quadrangle, now used for officers' quarters.

Immediately to the north of "100" is the modern Post Hospital, built in 1934 and greatly enlarged by the addition of temporary structures during World War II. Because of the insecurity of the filled-in land beyond the original sea wall, the foundations of both "100" and the Hospital rest on piles driven deep into the harbor bed.

Meanwhile, the present Protestant Chapel of St. Cornelius the Centurion overlooking Buttermilk Channel was built by Trinity

Parish of New York, from the designs of the eminent architect Charles C. Haight, himself a Union Army veteran and father of the celebrated cavalryman, Colonel Sidney Haight. This beautiful granite house of worship, supplanting the original wooden chapel erected in 1847, was dedicated with imposing ecclesiastical and military ceremonies by Bishop Greer of the Episcopal Church on October 19, 1906. A set of electronic chimes was installed in the Chapel tower in 1949, a gift of the garrison. The Chapel, which is open to the public, contains many memorials and military relics of great historic interest.

The Catholic Chapel, *Star of the Sea*, is opposite the east end of "100" and marks the location of the old Post Cemetery; the remains of those interred there were removed in 1886 to the Cypress Hills Cemetery in Brooklyn.

WORLD WARS I AND II

- The increased Island area proved invaluable during World War I, when the entire south portion of the Island was covered with warehouses for temporary storage of war supplies before being shipped to France. More than \$75,000,000 worth of war materials was kept on the Island, and there was developed at the same period one of the shortest railroads in the world, the eight-mile long "Governors Island R.R." complete with cars and engines.

It is not generally known that to Governors Island goes the credit for making the first overt act of World War I on the part of the United States. On Good Friday, April 6, 1917, at 3:12 A.M., Congress declared War against Germany. Eighteen minutes later a battalion of the 22nd Infantry, then garrisoning the Island, set out in boats of the Revenue Service to seize the German ships and crews in the harbor. By noon all German ships had been seized and the seamen safely interned at Ellis Island.

Five years later the Island's troops were again called to arms, when Wall Street and the financial district were thrown into a turmoil by the explosion of a deadly and mysterious bomb, immediately in front of the Sub-Treasury and opposite the great banking house of J.P. Morgan. Fearing a criminal raid on the Sub-Treasury's vaults, the treasury officials requested extra protection until the situation was under control, and two companies of the 22nd Infantry were rushed to the scene. A cordon of sentinels was thrown around the treasury building and the adjacent streets cleared, thus permitting the police and fire authorities to give their entire attention to the restoration of normal conditions.

In more than a century and a quarter as a permanent installation of the United States Army, Governors Island has been a home for some of our most famous regiments and commanders. The roster of Infantry units who have served here includes the 1st, 3rd, 16th,

22nd, and 29th Regiments, while the Artillery has been represented by the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th Regiments. Among the officers who have been on duty on the Island may be mentioned such notable generals as Hancock, Grant, Sherman, Schofield, Miles, Shafter, Merritt, Arthur MacArthur, Chaffee, Leonard Wood, Bliss, Bullard, Ely, Summerall, Drum, Hodges, and currently Walter Bedell Smith.

From 1821 to 1919, Governors Island was for varying periods the headquarters for Army activities in the East, including the Eastern Department, Division of the Atlantic, Department of the East and Atlantic Division.

In August 1920, the peacetime reorganization of the Army established nine Corps Areas throughout the country, Governors Island becoming Headquarters of the Second Corps Area, which comprised New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Puerto Rico.

Four Field Armies were created in September, 1933, and the First Army, with its heroic World War I record, was reestablished with headquarters on Governors Island. In June, 1941, the Eastern Defense Command was set up for the protection of the Atlantic Seaboard, and the new headquarters was joined to that of the First Army, the combined organization being known as the Eastern Defense Command and the First Army. This resulted in two commands having headquarters on Governors Island, that of EDC and the First Army and of the Second Corps Area. Until the First Army was separated from the Eastern Defense Command in the fall of 1943, the two components were supervised by a joint headquarters under Lieutenant General Hugh A. Drum. Originally including sixteen Eastern seaboard states and the District of Columbia, the Eastern Defense Command in 1945 included forty of the forty-eight states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Army Bases at Newfoundland, Greenland, Iceland and Bermuda. Close liaison was maintained with adjacent military commands in Mexico and Canada. During this period the First Army developed into a well-trained field force, participating in widescale maneuvers in the fall of 1941 and otherwise preparing for its World War II combat role.

The chief Reception Center for inductees of the New York area was also established on the Island at this time, when Selective Service was put into effect.

In July of 1942 the Corps Areas were redesignated "Service Commands," with the Second Service Command Headquarters on Governors Island. Geographically, the Second Service Command covered the same territory as the Second Corps Area: New York, New Jersey and Delaware. The Service Command was entrusted to quell all internal disorder, whether from strikes, sabotage or any type of fifth column activity; this, of course, in addition to its primary mission of furnishing supplies and services to the Army Ground Forces and Army Air Forces.

THE FIRST ARMY

● On October 12, 1943, the First Army embarked for overseas, established headquarters at Bristol, England and began intensive preparations for the cross-channel assault of the Normandy beaches on June 6, 1944. The Eastern Defense Command continued with headquarters on Governors Island until it was inactivated.

The accomplishments of the First Army throughout its successful campaigns in World War II are best told in the six important phrases synonymous with the designation of the First Army and the symbols of its achievements: *First on the Normandy Beaches—First to break through at St. Lo—First to liberate Paris—First to invade German soil—First to cross the Rhine—First to reach the Russians.* Contact with the Russians on April 25, 1945 brought to a close the combat operations of the First Army in Europe.

Within two months of VE Day an advance detachment of the headquarters of the First Army arrived in Manila for General Courtney H. Hodges' new striking force in the Pacific war. An assault mission in the Tokyo Bay area was the then-planned final offensive operation against Japan. The Japanese surrender on September 2, 1945 rendered unnecessary the execution of these plans.

In July, 1946, under the newest reorganization of the Army, the nation was organized into six Army Areas, the First Army returning its headquarters to its old station on Governors Island. In this reorganization, the First Army Area included the New England states, New York, New Jersey, and Delaware. On January 1, 1949, Delaware was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Second Army Area to make the First Army Area identical to that of the First Air Force.

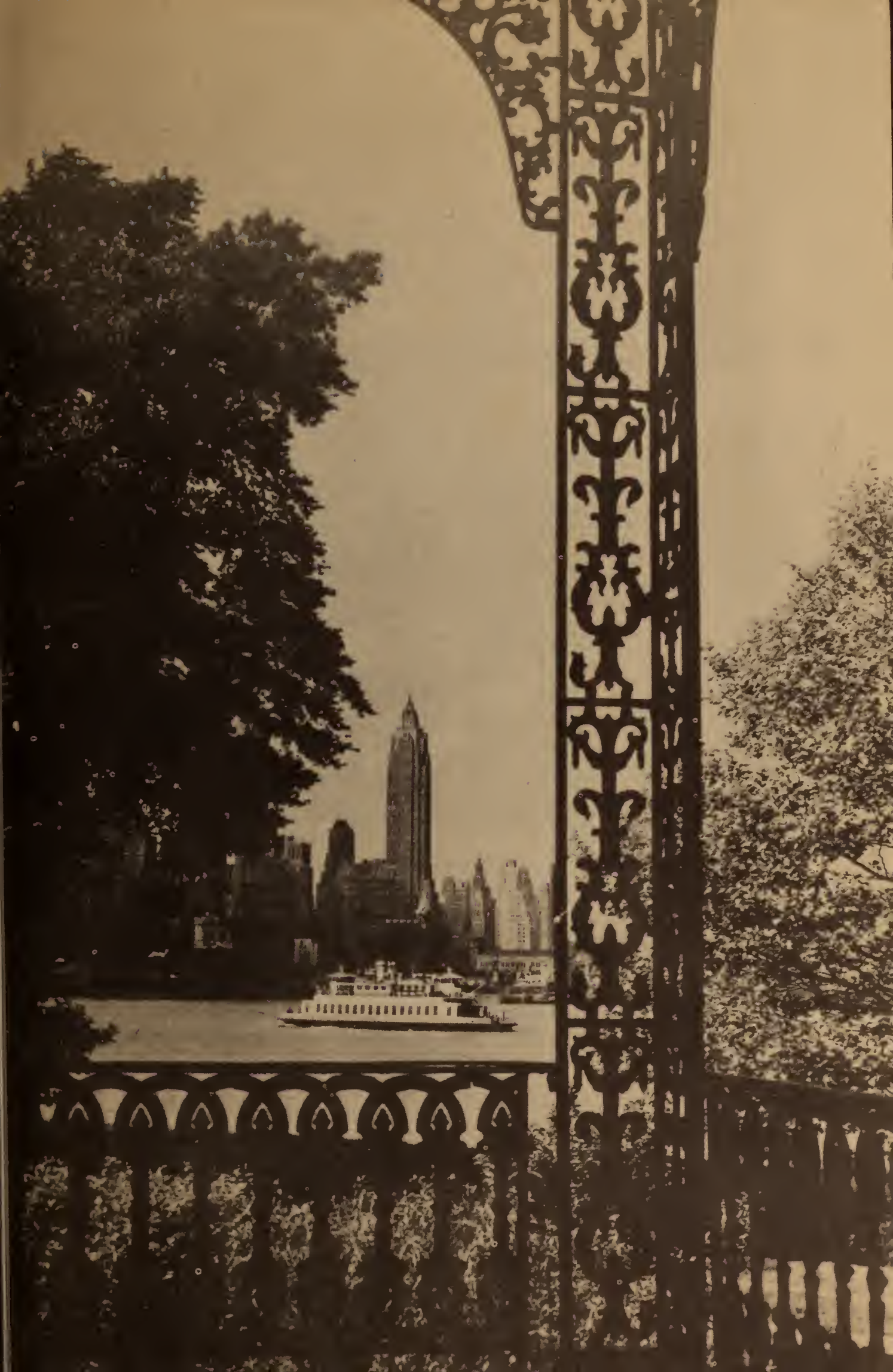
Though small geographically, the First Army Area includes 20% of the population of the United States. In its peacetime role, the greatest responsibilities of the First Army are the organization and supervision of training of the Civilian Components and the direction and control of recruiting within the Area, in addition to the normal control of Regular Army units stationed in the First Army Area.

The "big A" worn by men and women of the United States First Army is a familiar shoulder patch to residents of the New York metropolitan area.

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